



**THE FIGHT FOR
WOMEN'S RIGHTS**
1918-2018

THE VIEW OF THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN FROM INSIDE THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Representation of the People Bill

Clause 4. Franchises Women

House of Commons Debate:

15 November 1917

AND THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE...

Artefacts and ephemera
from the Women's Suffrage
Movement and the ongoing
fight for women's equality
(1906-present)

A woman shall be entitled to be registered as a Parliamentary elector for a constituency (other than a university constituency) if she—

- (a) has attained the age of thirty years; and
 - (b) is not subject to any legal incapacity; and
 - (c) is entitled to be registered as a local government elector in respect of the occupation of land or premises in that constituency, or is the wife of a husband entitled to be so registered.
- (2) A woman shall be entitled to be registered as a Parliamentary elector for a university constituency if she has attained the age of thirty years and would be entitled to be so registered if she were a man.⁶⁸⁴
- (3) A woman shall be entitled to be registered as a local government elector for any local government electoral area where she would be entitled to be so registered if she were a man: Provided that a husband and wife shall not both be qualified as local government electors in respect of the same property.

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MAJOR HUNT

I beg to move, in Subsection (1), to leave out from the word "elector"["registered as a Parliamentary elector"] to the end of the Subsection, and to insert instead thereof the words, "and to vote for any constituency in which she was born if she is nineteen years of age or over and is serving or has served outside the United Kingdom during this War under the Admiralty or War Office, and this shall be the only qualification necessary in these cases, and this right to vote shall continue for life."

I move this Amendment because I think that the women who go abroad in this War to serve their country ought to have the vote on the same qualification as men. Everybody who has gone abroad to fight for us, or to help other people to fight for us, ought to have the vote; therefore I have made the age the same for women as the age for men. I have thought all along that this Franchise Bill should really be only a Franchise Bill for those who have served us in the War, and certainly they ought to have the vote for life. I do not know any hon. Member who will second my Amendment, but hon. Members, when they go down to their constituencies and are asked why women who have served their country abroad should not on the same terms as men be allowed to vote, will have a very difficult question to answer.

Amendment not seconded.

SIR G. YOUNGER

I beg to move, in Sub-section (1, c), after the word "premises"["in respect of the occupation of land or premises"], to insert the words, "of the yearly value of not less than ten pounds, or of a dwelling-house."

The object of this Amendment is very simple. As the Bill now stands the local government qualification and the Parliamentary



Tags= March, Eleanor Rathbone, Elickr, LSE,
Women's Library, UK, Edinburgh, c.1935

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vote are not the same for men and women in respect of the occupation franchise. A man must occupy premises of the value of £10, otherwise he does not have the occupation vote. Under the Bill the woman is not in that position at all, and will get the vote whatever the value ⁶⁸⁵ of the premises in which she happens to be. It seems quite an absurdity for that to be so, and I have no doubt the right hon. Gentleman is satisfied as to the anomaly, and I suppose will remedy it.

COLONEL SANDERS

I beg to second the Amendment.

MR. FISHER

My hon. Friend seems to think that women ought to be placed on the same footing as men in regard to their qualification, and claim to be on the register. Those who followed the proceedings of the Speaker's Conference will realise that some method had to be agreed on by which only a very limited number of women should be placed upon the register. The Speaker's Conference, in considering the qualification of women, were actually governed by the idea that only that limited number of women would be placed upon the register, at all events, when we were considering the claims of women for the first time. My hon. Friend must remember that men have very easy means of getting upon the register compared with women. Here he picks out one case that shows women in a favoured position, and suggests that unless you attach the same value to the premises, the occupation of which makes their qualification, you will be putting them in a more favourable position than that of men. There may be much truth in that, but while there is truth in it, the Speaker's Conference must have had, and I am informed did have, that very purpose in their minds, and did intend that women should get upon the local government register in respect of premises to



Tags= March, [Wikipedia](#), Roma, Lesotho, c.1995

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which there was no ascertained value. They laid down a very simple guiding rule by which women could obtain the vote in respect of premises to which there was no value attached. If I accepted the Amendment of the hon. Baronet, although under other circumstances it might be reasonable, I should be encroaching very much indeed upon the ground which is now occupied by women, and should be evicting women from ground which they would occupy if the Bill were passed as it passed through Committee of this House. I must take as my guide the Speaker's Conference and the decision of the Committee of the House. Although there may be something illogical in these proceedings, and something—

SIR G. YOUNGER

Unfair[...]

MR. FISHER

My hon. Friend says "unfair;" but he must remember that we are ⁶⁸⁶allowing men to retain their place upon the register in many cases which are wholly denied to women. The Speaker's Conference has limited the number of women who will obtain a place on the register. In view of that limitation, I do not think that men ought to complain if in one or two instances, in order to obtain some kind of rule by which women should get on the list, we do as the hon. Baronet has said.

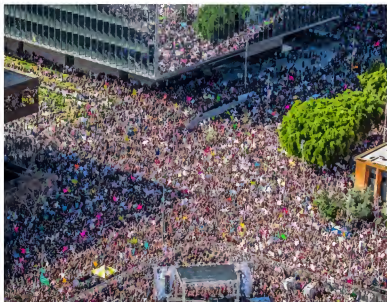
SIR G. YOUNGER

I do not propose to press my Amendment, but I am not in the slightest degree impressed by the arguments of the right hon. Gentleman.

MR. H. SAMUEL

The right hon. Gentleman has defended the proposal that

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Tags= March, Flickr, Women's march, Los Angeles, USA, 2017

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women shall be put upon the local government register more easily than men on the ground that the Bill so provides. I am not at all sure that it does. If we look at the particular Clause, in the first Sub-section, we read: (1) A woman shall be entitled to be registered as a Parliamentary elector if she (c) is entitled to be registered as a local government elector in respect of the occupation of land or premises in that constituency, or is the wife of a husband to be so registered. The qualification to be on the register is to be found in Sub-section (3). We find: (3) A woman shall be entitled to be registered as a local government elector for any local government electoral area where she would be entitled to be so registered if she were a man.

SIR G. YOUNGER

They cannot get on at all unless there is occupation.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

MR. HOLT

I beg to move, at the end of Sub-section (2), to insert the words "or has passed such examinations as would entitle her to receive a degree if she were a man."

The object of this is to deal with the position of women at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The Bill provides that a woman is to have a university vote if she has obtained a degree, but it is well known that certain universities have refused to confer their degrees upon women, and we get this absurd position, that whereas the House of Commons has decided that women shall have votes under ⁶⁸⁷ certain conditions the governing bodies of certain universities have it in their power to deprive women of their votes. I do not think that is a satisfactory state of affairs, and I do not think it is one to which this House ought to agree. The object of

IMAGE 04

SUFFRAGETTE RIOT NEAR ROYAL PALACE.

A hundred Suffragettes, including Mrs. Pankhurst, made an attempt to interview the King at Buckingham Palace this afternoon, with disastrous results to the militants.

Photo shows Chief Inspector Rolfe carrying Mrs. Pankhurst to the police station.

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Tags= Arrest, Emmeline Pankhurst, [Flickr](#), LSE, Women's Library, London, UK, 1912

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my Amendment, which may not be very well drafted, is to provide that where a woman has had in substance the same university education and has passed the same tests as a man she shall be entitled to the vote, and it shall not be in the power of the university authorities, merely by reason of her sex, to deprive her of that vote. If the Government cannot accept this Amendment I hope they will accept some other Amendment which will effect the object aimed at.

MR. CHANCELLOR

I beg to second the Amendment.

It seems very strange that because a woman has not received a degree she should be deprived of a vote. Many women pass examinations very brilliantly, and some even distinguish themselves above the men with whom they compete, and yet these brilliant and highly educated women are to be deprived of the vote. It seems an absurd position, and I hope the Government will accept the Amendment.

MR. RENDALL

This Amendment is only in keeping with the spirit of the recommendation of the Speaker's Conference. Therefore I hope the right hon. Gentleman will accept the Amendment, because by so doing he will be complying in the most complete manner possible with the Conference recommendation.

MR. H. SAMUEL

I hope the Government will deal with this Amendment with sympathy. I have always regarded it as a very monstrous injustice that women should go to universities, should pass through precisely the same educational course as men, should pass precisely the same examinations as men, and yet at the end of it all should be deprived of degrees which



Tags= March, [Flickr](#), Women's march, Seattle, USA, 2018

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they would have had if they were of the opposite sex. I do not know on what grounds such an anomaly can possibly be defended, and it is a plain and obvious injustice such as that which gave to the Women's Suffrage movement a good deal of the bitterness that characterised it. Every woman who has completed a university course and passed her examinations, possibly taking a high class, who ⁶⁸⁸thereafter finds herself not entitled to add to her name the initials B.A. or M.A., or whatever it may be, has a feeling for the rest of her life of rankling injustice. It was bad enough when this deprivation of her degree merely affected her right to vote in university matters, and deprived her of an honorific title, but when the franchise entitles her to a vote, it seems to me this anomaly should be ended once and for all. The Speaker's Conference particularly intended that university women should have the university franchise. Any university can defeat that by saying, "Yes, you women may have passed your examinations and completed your courses, but we shall not admit you as graduates; consequently you shall not have the Parliamentary franchise." I think Parliament ought to take cognisance of that, and see that its intentions are carried into practice.

SIR W. BEALE

I feel very strongly with the right hon. Gentleman in this matter, but I see a very great difficulty. You cannot set up a registering authority to decide whether a woman has passed the proper examinations or not, and if you are to make the franchise dependent upon this sort of qualification, the university, after all, has to decide whether the qualification has been obtained or not.

MR. SAMUEL

The university itself is the registering authority under the Bill.



Tags= Arrest, [Flickr](#), LSE , Women's Library, Flora Drummond, London, UK, c.1914

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SIR W. BEALE

I quite follow that, but the difficulty, I understand the right hon. Gentleman to say, is that they will not give the degree. Therefore I would suggest that some such words as these might be adopted: "or has obtained a certificate from some university authority entitled to grant degrees that she has passed such examinations as would entitle her to such degree."

MR. FISHER

If the Speaker's Conference had in their minds only certain women who passed certain examinations should be qualified to have the university vote, they were singularly unfortunate in the way in which they expressed their wishes, because they were most definite on the point. We have drafted our Bill on the decisions of the Speaker's Conference, and have endeavoured, under much difficulty in this House, to adhere to the decisions of that Conference. It is very distinctly laid down in the recommendation that votes should be limited to women who have a degree. I have the greatest ⁶⁸⁹ possible sympathy with my right hon. Friend. I think women who attend and go through their regular course of study at Oxford or Cambridge are amongst the flower of the women intellectually, and if those who are trained at more modern universities are considered qualified for the franchise, so far as those universities are liberal enough to give them a degree, at all events those who have passed through the perhaps stiffer course of Oxford or Cambridge, have proved themselves to be quite as—I will not say more—worthy of the vote, as those who have had training at the other universities. But we think it is extremely difficult to go beyond the recommendation of the Speaker's Conference, which laid down that the degree is to be the qualification and not the amount of attainment or learning tested by examination.



Tags= March, Elickr, Washington, USA, 2017

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With regard to this particular Amendment, the words proposed would be very difficult of interpretation, I am informed, and it would be quite possible, if the authorities at Oxford or Cambridge were determined a woman should not have a degree, if they still took the old-fashioned view, so to conduct those examinations that they would be secure in their opposition. The position is not very satisfactory to myself, because I think the House will see from my observations that I am in very hearty sympathy with the desire of the Mover of the Amendment, and I think it would be very unfair, to say the least of it, and very prejudicial to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge—for it to continue. When it is found that in the other eight universities which are to be represented in Parliament the qualification for a woman is the taking of a degree, I cannot help thinking that the university with which I was associated and which I love so much, and the great university of Cambridge will reconsider their attitude towards women, and will conclude that after all they are not going to have the women associated with their universities who have displayed such excellence in the course of their studies put into an utterly inferior position as regards the franchise compared with the women who will be the undergraduates of other universities. I think in any case that the force of public opinion would secure the aim which my hon. Friend has in view. Neither my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary nor myself will lose sight of this subject, and there is another place where the matter can be considered.

690 If we find that this form of words is not calculated to attain the end so many of us have in view we will consider whether some other form of words can be adopted. Communications can be made with Oxford and Cambridge, and there are Members of this House representing both Oxford and Cambridge who have the means of influencing matters. Before long the whole of this matter must be reconsidered, and, I cannot help thinking that the desire which so many of us have will be attained, I



Tags= Arrest, Rosa May Billinghurst, [Flickr](#), LSE, Women's Library, UK , 1908

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do not say immediately, but in time for the women who take their degree at Oxford and Cambridge to have the vote.

MR. ACLAND

I rise to say how very glad I was to hear the speech to which, we have just listened from the President of the Local Government Board, and it sounds as if he meant business. I agree that it is not quite easy now, and probably not possible now, to make this Amendment in the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman, who is a distinguished representative of Oxford, has said that this matter will be brought to the notice of the authorities of Oxford and Cambridge. It would only be perpetuating a very great unfairness and would be little less than a serious anomaly that women should be not given a vote in respect of a university degree in these two universities just the same as in, other universities. I am glad the right hon. Gentleman did not shut the door to the consideration of this matter, and that he has promised that communications will be made in the proper quarter. Under these circumstances, I think it would be better not to press this Amendment forward now, in view of the hopeful direction in which the Government seem to be moving.

MR. HOLT

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the friendly way in which he has met this proposal. I understood him to say that he would communicate with the universities of Oxford and Cambridge before the Bill is finished with in another place.

MR. FISHER

We will consider the whole position in the light of these facts. in another place.



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Tags= March, Women's march, YouTube, London, UK, 2017

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MR. HOLT

I ask leave to withdraw my Amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

MAJOR HUNT

I beg to move, in Subsection (3), to leave out the words "where she would be entitled to be so registered ⁶⁹¹ if she were a man: Provided that a husband and wife shall not both be qualified as local government electors in respect of the same property, "and to insert instead thereof the words "in which she was born, if she is nineteen years of age or over and is serving or has served during this War outside the United Kingdom under the Admiralty or War Office, and in these cases this shall be the only qualification necessary for registration and voting and shall continue for life."

This is an Amendment with much the same object as the last proposal. Under the Bill the Government is going to allow the conscientious objector not only to have the Parliamentary franchise, but also the local franchise, while women who have gone out voluntarily with comparatively small pay are to have no voice in the destinies of their country at all. I would point out that these passive resisters not only refuse to fight themselves, but they have done their best to prevent other people from fighting. If there is any justice left in the House of Commons, I think hon. Members should at least insist on these women having the local government vote. I cannot help thinking that when it becomes known in the country how these women have been treated, and how these conscientious objectors have been able to get a vote and to get into Government employment on high wages, and have stayed at home while these women went out to the War, it will be greatly resented. You could not do without these women at the front. You cannot do without the women who help you



Tags= "Demonstration, Emmeline Pankhurst, Flickr, LSE, Mary Lowndes Archive, London, UK, c.1908"

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in this great War, and yet the women who have helped you voluntarily and done their best, under this Bill are not going to have any say in the government of the country.

Amendment not seconded.

MR. ACLAND

I beg to move, in Subsection (3), to leave out the words "Provided that a husband and wife shall not both be qualified as local government electors in respect of the same property," and to insert instead thereof the words "or where she is the wife of a man entitled to be so registered."

This Amendment is rather important, and I hope the House will give it full attention. I may explain in a few words why I think it is justifiable to bring it before the House, even though at first sight it seems to conflict with one of the Clauses in the ⁶⁹² Report of the Speaker's Conference. I have taken very little part in the actual discussions on this Bill, but my feeling has been to find what was the Report of the Speaker's Conference and then support it, because I felt unless that was done the Bill would not have a very good chance of passing. When I come to consider any suggested alteration, it seems to me very necessary to examine, first of all, whether it can fairly be considered to represent any essential balance of opinion on the Speaker's Conference. If something that one wants to alter is really an essential part of some other part of the Bill which one does not want to alter as being part of a balanced compromise, then it is not fair to fight, but when one comes to consider whether there should be any large extension of the municipal vote to women at all one finds that the question really was not referred to the Conference. This matter was brought up on the Committee stage by my right hon. Friend who is now on his way to India, and the Home Secretary said he could not accept the Amendment.



Tags= March, Fourth Wave, [Flickr](#), London, UK, 2017

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The House was rather thin, and the subject was new. He said that the whole object of appointing the Conference was, if possible, to come to an arrangement on matters affecting elections to Parliament, and nothing was referred to them as to the local government franchise. I should like to submit that no one, even if his feelings in this matter be strong, can fairly claim that the opinion of the Speaker's Conference on something which, in the words of the Home Secretary, was not referred to them, can be regarded as an essential part of their recommendations on something which was referred to them. No one, I think, would claim on their behalf the right to bring in to their recommendations any view which they may have formed outside the matters within their reference. But the House, I think, will be willing to regard this from a somewhat wider outlook.

The question of women's enfranchisement has passed into a wider sphere. The decision of the House of Commons on the matter was carried by a very large majority. That decision to confer upon women the rights of citizenship, as represented by the power of voting, was very widely welcomed by the nation as a whole, and the compromise that was arrived at in the Speaker's Conference with regard to the Parliamentary vote was thought to be very reasonable. That decision of the House was regarded not only ⁶⁹³by individual women but by the organisations which speak for them as a really big and generous instalment of political power, and as likely to still any controversy on the subject for a very considerable number of years to come. That, I think, is still the general view. Let us try this experiment, even though some of us have our doubts as to its wisdom, in a way that will make it most likely that the women will settle down to the actual duties of citizenship, and least likely that there will be a continuation of agitation and discontent, or anything of that sort. We feel that women are to be trusted in political matters, not only because we are

Votes for Women 9

726743 VOTES FOR WOMEN

Sunday, June 21st

Procession from

Paddington to Hyde Park.

Assembles 1 p.m., Starts 2 p.m.

Tags= March, [Flickr](#), LSE, Women's Library, London, UK, 1908

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grateful for what they have done in the War, but because we foresee that the immediate years ahead of us are going very likely to be extremely difficult. There is going to be a time of great and rapid growth and development and construction. The next ten years may be far more vital for good or evil in our history than any other ten years that we have seen.

We feel that married women represent the responsible and stable element in our community, and should have a real share and a real duty in fashioning our fortunes and moulding the lines along which we shall move during those very critical times. If one looks at it from that point of view and realises that subjects such as health, housing, education, employment, the use of land, temperance, control of prices and supplies of commodities, and things of that kind represent an enormous book on which perhaps several chapters will come to be written in the next five or ten years, and that on each of those great subjects the general lines of policy must be directed from the Imperial Parliament at the centre, but that each of them falls to be administered locally, then, if they are really to regard themselves as full citizens, these women ought to have a share not only in the formation of the central guiding lines of policy to be laid down by the Houses of Parliament, but in the administration of the measures that are passed. In moulding the general lines in Parliament we are going to ask the great mass of this stable element in our country, the married women, to have a share, but as the Bill now stands, unless this Amendment is made, they will be excluded from all share in administration and in the carrying out of the will of Parliament as expressed in Acts of Parliament regarding health, housing, education, employment, and so ⁶⁹⁴ on; unless, of course, they have technically an occupation, in which case they will come on the register in respect of their separate occupation. For the Parliamentary vote the married woman is to come on automatically, but for the municipal vote she

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is not to come on automatically at all. Is it not the fact that in the vast majority of houses in this country the woman is in charge of all those activities which centre in the home, and should not that give her some definite claim to a share through her vote in the administration of those matters which so much concern her. In many cases she is really far more truly the occupier than her husband, who is away all day at his work. Questions of maternity welfare, housing, food, and education come more closely home to her than they do to her husband, and she has all the opportunities of forming a definite opinion and taking a definite interest in the administration of those questions. Indeed, I have never heard any serious argument against married women being given a right to a share in local affairs.

What are we likely to have during this very difficult time which lies ahead? These big questions and all sorts of others which we cannot foresee will crowd in the attention of Parliament. We shall want to go forward and the local authorities will want to go forward, some faster and some slower. They will want to be left with some latitude for experiment. They will want Acts or parts of Acts made permissive so that they may adopt them if and when they please. That principle of giving permissive powers to local authorities will be very useful and all the more useful the more crowded our time and the more great questions throng upon us, because when an Act is made permissive it is not so necessary to lay down here all the details. If women are excluded from all share in the municipal vote, how will they try to frame our legislation? This great mass of married women would surely say, from their point of view, quite rightly, that they cannot afford to leave anything to the administration of the local authority for in that they have no direct share as voters. They will say that in deciding the general lines of what Parliament is to do they get their Parliamentary vote, but they get no share in the local



Tags= Arrest, Emmeline Pankhurst, [Flickr](#), Nationaal Archief, London, UK, c.1907

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administration of what Parliament has decided. They will have to insist that the exact lines of what must be done by the local authorities shall be ⁶⁹⁵laid down in Parliament. They will not be willing that things should be left to the local authorities to do in the way they like and when they like; they will say they must have everything laid down, cut and dried for them, in that body which alone they can influence by their votes. That will have two effects, both of them, I fear, unfortunate. First, that Parliament will tend to be over-burdened with matters which might be left to the authorities; and, secondly, that local authorities will be deprived of some of the initiative which, in matters of health, housing, education and so on, ought and could safely be left to them. That will be the tendency so far as the influence of the married women's vote is concerned, unless we give them the same powers in regard to local as in regard to the central elections.

9.00 P.M.

During the last few weeks those who have been watching have seen a very curious and interesting instance of the jealousy which authorities have of anything which they may think to be bureaucratic action by Government Departments. Their action has, I am sorry to say, to some extent held up the Education Bill which the President of the Board of Education has laid before this House. We do not want to have anything the result of which will be that this House and the Executive which depends upon this House will have to lay things down in such a cut and dried and exact way that the local authorities will feel that they are being bound by bureaucratic regulations or bureaucratic officials. It is very important to leave the local authorities to feel that they are responsible for making these matters of health, housing and education a success. The more we can keep out from our politics any force which will tend

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Tags= Millicent Fawcett, Flickr, LSE, Women's Library, UK, c.1910

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to get everything exactly regulated from the centre, because it is the centre they can control, the better it will be from the point of view of encouraging local authorities to do the best work. I have heard two suggestions as to the objections to married women having the municipal vote. First, it is urged that the women are not actually ratepayers. That question ought not to be looked at according to whether it is the husband or the wife who actually pays the rates. In a great many cases the wife has to do it. She is allowed so much money a week or a month and has to pay thereout what is necessary to satisfy the demands of both ⁶⁹⁶ the rent collector and the rate collector when they come round. Therefore one cannot pin an argument on the fact that perhaps in the majority of cases the man actually satisfies the rate collector's demands. Anything which is a general burden on the household is a burden on the woman, in the great majority of cases. even more than a burden on the man. A burden of that kind, such as the satisfaction of the demands of the rate collector, falls just as much on the woman. If the burdens go up, they affect the woman just as much as they do the man. In fact, if she feels that the higher the rates go the less. she will have for herself and her children and for feeding the family, she will surely be every bit as careful to avoid extravagant expenditure by the ratepayers as her husband would be. Then, of course, it is often stated that the present woman's municipal vote is a rather unprogressive and an unintelligent one. That is very largely true and is almost inevitable, for the reason that at present you do not have any natural association of the women municipal voters. You never have a street in which every house, or anything like every house, is occupied by a woman municipal voter. You may have one in No. 1, another in No. 30 and another in No. 60, but they are few and far between, and there is no natural communication between them and no natural discussion of public affairs. You lack that community of sympathy and interest which will inevitably



IMAGE 03

Tags= Speech, Diane Abbott, Youtube, London, UK, 1987

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happen when you give every married woman, automatically, the municipal vote. If this Amendment were carried, four married women out of every five living in an ordinary street would be municipal voters and there would at once be something for them to discuss and work at, and instead of their voting being isolated, ill-informed and, perhaps, unintelligent, you will get that keenness and intelligence which springs from community of interest and work.

As to the form of the Amendment, although I am moving it in the same form as that in which it was moved by my right hon. Friend on the Committee stage, if the Government thought that the House generally were in favour of accepting it or would leave it to the House to be voted on, I do not think that those who are promoting this change would mind very much what the form should be. Several alternative forms are down on the Paper from which the Government can select. It ⁶⁹⁷ might well be that the form next on the Paper would be the best, which adds to the Amendment I move the words "in respect of premises in which they both reside," so as to make it clear that the woman would only get her automatic vote as a wife in respect of premises in which she resides with her husband, and not in respect of his business premises, with which, of course, she has less to do. We thought it better to put down the possible alternatives and leave it to the Government to indicate which they preferred. On the merits of the matter, once we were certain, as we are, that it is not properly to be considered as bound by the determination of Mr. Speaker's Conference, we are clear that we ought to press the question. In conclusion, let me say this: Let us, in the time that is coming, clear the decks as much as we possibly can from questions of machinery. There is no doubt whatever that this Amendment represents very strong and very active opinion in the country. There is no doubt that, if married women are not admitted to the municipal franchise, they will feel that the gift



IMAGE 04



Tags= Margaret Thatcher, Wikipedia,
George Bush Presidential Library, Aspen, USA, 1990

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of Parliament has been rather half-hearted. What they will do will be worse than that; they will set to work at once to agitate and organise for an amending Bill to be passed. We have a chance of putting the thing right now. We do not want amending Bills on this or any other matter which is only a question of machinery. We want to make the machinery of our local and central government as good as we possibly can against the time when peace comes, when all these tremendous social questions will press on the best brains and the best work that every man and every woman can possibly give to them. Any effort at that time given merely in trying to get machinery right will be effort wasted. The machinery ought surely to be put right now. It would be ten thousand pities if any women had to waste any time in trying to get an extra piece of machinery embodied in a Bill and then passed through Parliament into an Act. I have had hundreds of resolutions from all sorts of associations and societies of women who feel strongly on this matter.

SIR G. YOUNGER

Does the right hon. Gentleman really mean hundreds? I have never had one myself.

MR. ACLAND

I have. I do not say that the fact is owing to my position as an ordinary Member of Parliament. I ⁶⁹⁸ have been trying to find out what women thought about it. I really have received hundreds. But I do not claim that that has been the fate of everyone. This is a letter which I received this morning from the Richmond Committee of Organised Women. This is exactly symptomatic of what I have had dozens of: That this committee of organised women representing the following seventeen societies, the Richmond Emergency Committee, the British Women's Temperance Association, the Richmond Board of

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IMAGE 05



Tags= Nancy Astor, [Wikipedia](#), Library of Congress,
c.1908

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Guardians, the Women's Liberal Association, the Richmond Women's Suffrage Society, the Girls' Friendly Society, the Women's Co-operative Society, the Infant Health Association, Richmond Central Aid, Mothers' Union Society, Richmond School Teachers, Independent Labour Party, the Mavis Association for the Care of Young Girls, the Salvation Army, the Young Women's Christian Association, the War Savings Association, and the Women Police urges the Government— and so on— to accept this Bill.

SIR G. CAVE

Which Richmond?

MR. ACLAND

Richmond, Surrey. Does the Home Secretary really want all the most excellent representatives of all these most excellent societies to take up one moment of their efforts on a question of machinery which may be put right now? Would he not prefer that they should get the machinery settled so that they can really tackle in their several ways the work that lies before them? I appeal to the House to look at this matter from a big standpoint, to clear it out of the way, to admit married women to a share in local, as they have in imperial affairs, and thus get the influence of women in our politics applied in the best manner and in a manner in which so many women are looking forward to being able to use it.

MR. DUNCAN MILLAR

I beg to second the Amendment.

I sincerely hope the right hon. Gentleman will give it his favourable consideration. On the last occasion when it was considered there was considerable discussion upon it. The right hon. Gentleman was not prepared at that stage to



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Tags= Speech, Mhairi Black, Youtube, London, UK, 2017

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pronounce a final opinion It was a thin House and he made it quite clear that the whole matter would be reconsidered on Report. Meantime there have been a very strong and favourable expressions of opinion throughout the country in favour of the Amendment. No doubt the great majority of the associations to which my right hon. Friend (Mr. Acland) referred represent women. That is a fact, however, which the House of Commons ought to take ⁶⁹⁹into account, because in this matter when we are proceeding to enfranchise a large number of women and give them the Parliamentary vote we have indicated our desire that they should express their views and they are entitled to put clearly before us their views on a matter of this importance. But apart from the women's associations, speaking as a Scottish member, there have been a number of representations received from various bodies in Scotland interested in this matter, and there is a very strong feeling that it will be a gross injustice to the married women of the country if they are not allowed to exercise the local government vote, seeing that they are now being given the Parliamentary vote. I am glad that in this matter we have associated with us the hon. Member (Mr. Adamson), who represents the Labour party. Indeed, we have, supporting this Amendment, representatives of all sections of opinion in this House. On the previous occasion the speakers who supported the Amendment represented every section of political opinion, and there were very few who spoke against it. There are really only two substantial objections to this Amendment which are worthy of consideration. The first is that it might involve us in a breach of the compromise arrived at by the Speaker's Conference, and that it might, consequently, endanger the passage of the Bill, if the compromise were not adhered to. As a Scottish Member I feel that I have greater freedom in meeting that point, because the Resolution of the Speaker's Conference made it quite clear that the Conference made no recommendation with regard to the local government franchise

IMAGE 07



Tags= Flora Drummond, [Flickr](#), LSE, Women's Library, UK, c. 1907-1914

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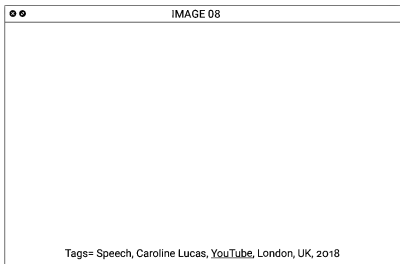
in Scotland or Ireland. Therefore, so far as Scotland and Ireland are concerned, there was undoubtedly no indication whatever given that the local government franchise was to be limited in any way.

SIR G. YOUNGER

They made no recommendation.

MR. MILLAR

I think "no recommendation" indicates that the Conference did not come to any decision whatever on the question. That is the meaning I should attach to it. With regard to the previous resolution, which undoubtedly indicates the view expressed by the Conference, that a husband and wife should not both be qualified in respect of the same premises, after all the Conference is ⁷⁰⁰mainly concerned with the question of Parliamentary representation—the terms of reference make that perfectly clear—and the question of the local government vote was only dealt with incidentally. I submit, therefore, that we are not acting in breach of the Conference proposals if we ask consideration of this Amendment at this stage. It is substantially a question of local government. We are not raising any controversy whatever with regard to the question of the Parliamentary franchise. The compromise is to be strictly adhered to, so far as the women's vote is concerned. With regard to the local government franchise, this Bill undoubtedly extends it in certain of its provisions, so far as women are concerned. The question of the extent to which women are to be added to the register is therefore one, really, which is perfectly open. But the real difficulty in which the House is being placed now lies in the adoption of the local government franchise basis for the purpose of conferring a Parliamentary vote upon women, and the suggestion that the local government vote should be refused to those women who are now being



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enfranchised. I submit that that is a situation which would lead to, very great misunderstanding and misconstruction outside this House. Parliament has not always acted with very great regard for what was logical, but it has endeavoured to avoid putting itself in any absurd position, which result would certainly follow unless this Amendment is accepted. The second main objection which was put forward and supported in certain quarters of the House was based on the ground that women ought to be treated on a different basis when you were dealing with the local government franchise, and that this ought to be limited to those who had a ratepayer's interest as distinct from the interests of those who have a Parliamentary vote. This point was put by the Home Secretary in somewhat curious terms, because, to quote his words, his view was that in dealing with a Parliamentary election you were dealing with "souls, or people, who have to be placed on the same footing as each other," while, on the other hand, when you were dealing with local government, "questions of actual ratepaying and local interests were of more importance than when you were dealing with larger questions." May I suggest that in dealing with the local electors you are also dealing with souls, and that you are dealing with bodies ⁷⁰¹ as well, with men and women who are very closely affected in their bodily welfare and comfort by the local conditions which surround them, and I submit respectfully that in such matters married women have a very special claim to consideration.

We have had complaints made that women have not exercised the municipal vote as they ought to have done. I think there is some foundation for that, but I think that if you put married women on the roll you are only affording a proper opportunity to those who at the present moment have the most important stake—I do not think I am exaggerating in putting it as high as that—in rearing children for the future, and who deserve every consideration in connection with the education and the



Tags= March, Charlotte Despard, Flickr, LSE, Women's Library, London, UK, 1911

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bringing up of boys and girls to whom we look in the future for help in building up our Empire. I submit, therefore, that the claims of women, and married women particularly, ought to receive special attention. I do not propose to follow my right hon. Friend (Mr. Acland) in mentioning all the various questions which are of special interest to women. There never has been a time such as this, when the control of so many matters in the domestic lives of the people has been so much placed in the hands of local authorities. Women, therefore, ought to have their claims in such matters as housing, health, infant welfare, and so forth, specially considered, and when the War is over those claims ought to continue to receive consideration. I sincerely hope that the Home Secretary will accept this Amendment. I am quite sure that it would cause very great disappointment and would lead to great annoyance on the part of many women who at this moment have proved their worth to the nation, if the Amendment were refused. On the other hand, its acceptance would result in nothing but good to the country, because we should have the benefit of women's assistance in dealing with the great problems of reconstruction.

SIR G. YOUNGER

This is a very large subject to be raised in a thin House at this stage of the Bill. No doubt the arguments which have been used by the Mover and Seconder of the Amendment are worthy of consideration, and they have been extremely well put, but the position is wholly different from that of the Parliamentary franchise. As every-⁷⁰² one knows, the municipal vote is based on the payment of rates alone, and to the proposal at this late stage of the Bill that one of the unanimous recommendations of the Speaker's Conference should, for some reason or other, be disregarded, has not, I think, been made good by either the Proposer or the Seconder. They must have particularly

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Tags= Margaret Beckett, Wikipedia, London, UK, 2017

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good reasons for asking that that recommendation should be upset; but the reasons advanced have not been sufficient, in my estimation. Very often this privilege of the local franchise has never been exercised by women. I do not know why all this dust should be raised about the matter now. I hope the Home Secretary will stand by the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference. He has done so almost invariably throughout, and I think that every unanimous recommendation which they have made has been accepted. I should be very much astonished if my right hon. Friend sees his way to accept this Amendment. I do not seem to have received any particular remonstrances in regard to this matter. There may have been one or two documents coming to me which I have not noticed amongst the voluminous documents I receive every morning; but I am not conscious of having seen any. I do not know that any individual in Scotland has written to me, so that if the demand exists in Scotland it is not very articulate. It is apparently made known in certain quarters, but not in others. I do think that to make an enormous change of this kind at this stage of the Bill in a thin House during the dinner hour is quite out of the question, and I trust the Home Secretary will not accept the Amendment.

SIR F. BANBURY

Whether this proposal is right or wrong, it cannot be denied that it is an extremely revolutionary one. I do not know how many voters it is going to put on the local roll, but it must mean adding, if this Amendment is carried, a very large number of such voters. We have always understood that the proper qualification for a local government vote is that the person should be a ratepayer. If this Amendment were carried, you would be adding very largely to the number of people who not only do not pay rates, but who in some cases receive something from the rates, and those people

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might override the people who pay the rates. That may be right or it may be wrong. I am old-fashioned enough to think it is wrong, but whether ⁷⁰³it is right or wrong, this is not the opportunity or the time to introduce an Amendment of that sort. The Speaker's Conference made no recommendation of this kind, and though I do not hold that it is absolutely necessary never in any circumstances to alter the agreement come to by the Speaker's Conference, yet I have supported the Government in their contention that in all main principles the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference should not be altered. In those circumstances I trust that my right hon. Friend will reject the Amendment.

MR. ADAMSON

I have great pleasure in supporting the Amendment. The memory of my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr Burghs (Sir J. Younger) must be very short when he stated that he had received no representation on this point. During the Committee stage, when this same question was discussed, he, along with the other Members from Scotland, was approached by a very representative deputation, representing all shades of Labour opinion in Scotland. One of the questions that were pressed upon our attention at that time was that which we are now discussing. When this Amendment came before the House in Committee it was supported by members of all political parties, and the right hon. Gentleman in charge of the Bill used the same argument as has been used by the hon. Member for Ayr Burghs to-night. He said he did not want to pronounce any final opinion in Committee on this matter, 'but I certainly feel my responsibility and I do not think that it would be right, being in charge of this Bill, in so thin a House to accept an Amendment of this kind. I hope that we are not going to be put off a second time by an answer of that kind. Whether justifiable or not, that statement gave those who supported



Tags= Sew, Flickr, LSE, Women's Library, London, UK, 1910

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the Amendment in Committee some hope that it would have serious consideration on the Report stage, and I hope that, before the discussion is finished, we may be able to convince the right hon. Gentleman that this Amendment has sufficient support to justify its acceptance. Now that married women are given the Parliamentary franchise no good reason can be advanced for refusing them the local government vote. The fact that they have been granted the Parliamentary franchise is a complete answer to the right hon. Baronet the Member for the City of London. I think ⁷⁰⁴ that he used the expression that this was a revolutionary proposal. It is exactly the same proposal with regard to local government as you have already agreed to with regard to Parliamentary franchise.

MR. PETO

Is there any limitation of age in the proposal? Is it not women of any age over twenty-one, and not merely women over thirty?

MR. ADAMSON

This Amendment is asking for the same terms. I was pointing out that the proposal to enfranchise them for local government purposes is no more revolutionary than the principle which we have already adopted with regard to the Parliamentary franchise.

SIR F. BANBURY

The fact that you have made one revolution is no reason why you should make another.

MR. ADAMSON

The only reply which it is necessary to give to the right hon. Baronet is that this involves no new principle. It is not a second revolution. It is simply applying to local government the

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IMAGE 02



Tags= Wear, [Wikipedia](#),
The Women's Museum, Texas,
USA, 2009

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same principle as that to which you have already agreed with regard to Parliamentary franchise. No section of our people is better qualified to exercise the local government vote than the married women of the country. They have the experience and knowledge that fit them to exercise this vote to greater advantage, not only to themselves but to the country, than many others who already possess the vote. The Bill, as drafted, imposes great injustice on the working - class married women. After all, it is the married-class working women who, in the main, will be shut out unless this Amendment is accepted. It cannot be said that they have failed to play their part in the great struggle in which this country has been engaged for the past three years. No section of our people has been called upon to make greater sacrifices. I know that possibly from more quarters of the House than one we may be met with the argument, which has been used by the right hon. Baronet, that this will largely increase the number of electors. But we have done that for Parliamentary purposes, and we shall not scruple to do it as far as local government is concerned. It is quite as important that the laws should be well administered as that the laws should be well made. No section of our people is better qualified than married women to take part in local administration. Only yesterday I had the privilege of introducing to the ⁷⁰⁵right hon. Gentleman in charge of the Bill a very large and representative deputation of women. I think that he will admit that they put their case before him in a very clear and convincing manner. Like many others, I have had many representations made to me in regard to this matter, and if the vote is refused it will be a great disappointment to these women. I hope that they are not going to have that disappointment. I am pleased that the House is beginning to fill, and I hope that before we take a vote we shall have such an expression of opinion as will convince the right hon. Gentleman that the time has come for this to be granted.

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COLONEL GRETTON

We have had a most interesting discussion. Apparently the Government are willing to leave this very important matter to the decision of the House, though the absence of recommendations by the Speaker's Conference suggests that no change was intended in this direction. It does not appear to have been observed by any hon. Member who has addressed the House that all these women who are entitled to vote, because they are ratepayers, share in the extension of the franchise which results from the change of qualification which is common to men and women. There is a very large number of women, as well as a very large number of men ratepayers, to be added to the local register for the purpose of voting at local elections by the change in this Bill. This Amendment deals only with married women. Many Members who have addressed the House have wandered vaguely over the whole question, talked at large about women's votes, and treated the subject on the ground that married women should have the local vote equally with the Parliamentary vote. The right hon. Gentleman ended his speech by reading a very lengthy communication from a women's organisation which had been communicated to him, and the implication naturally was that these women, who command a very large section of the votes in the constituency represented by my right hon. Friend (Sir G. Cave), were going to be hostile to him if he did not meet the demand of the hon. Member opposite. That is obviously the interpretation to be put upon the remarks which the right hon. Gentleman made.

MR. ACLAND

The only point I made was this: The women's organisation, I may say, are friendly to my right hon. Friend ⁷⁰⁶ the Home Secretary, as is everybody in this House, and I said that I felt



IMAGE 04



Tags= Wear, [Flickr](#), LSE, Women's Library, UK, c.1910

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sure that everybody would see that these associations and organisations of women do very valuable work in connection with maternity, welfare of children, and things of that kind, and the question with them is that they shall have an opportunity of tackling this social work with which they are so peculiarly qualified to deal.

COLONEL GRETTON

I am very glad to receive that explanation from the right hon. Gentleman in regard to the organisation of these women, but I pass from that part of the question and come to the point as to what the result, between men and women, is going to be in this matter of the women's vote. It would appear to presuppose that there will be a sub-division of opinion between man and wife, and that the woman will have a particular point of view on municipal matters. The whole basis of the argument advanced in this House and outside is that women are not adequately represented by the votes of men. Hon. Members who support this Amendment obviously do so because they think that in certain directions women are going to be more effective than men, which means that there is going to be a very large division of opinion between husbands and wives on municipal questions; otherwise, husbands and wives would vote together, and thus the men's votes would be reinforced, and would tend to overwhelm the women who are already assured of the vote by this Bill, as ratepayers, equally with the men, who are ratepayers. That is a dilemma which no one has endeavoured to face. I submit that when this question is closely investigated it will be seen that the only value of the vote will be where there is contention between husband and wife. There can be no other meaning in it. I urge the Home Secretary that he would be well advised to adhere to his Bill, and not to be moved by the clamorous resolutions sent to him by hon. Members to alter the Bill in this very vital and



Tags= Wear, Flickr, LSE, Women's Library, UK, c.1914

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important particular. On this Bill the right hon. Gentleman has, against his own views, in numerous instances, adhered strictly to what he feels is the guiding principle of the Conference.

MR. MCKINNON WOOD

I support the Amendment, and wish to call attention to one or two points. In the first place all who support this proposal are perfectly willing to take it with the qualification as to age, as in the case of the Parliamentary ⁷⁰⁷ elector, namely, thirty years, so that there need be no difficulty of that kind. I was rather astonished to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr Burghs (Sir G. Younger) say that he had received no representations on this subject. For my part, I have received a great many, very varied and very representative in their character. I have received, of course, representations from a large number of women's organisations, and also from labour organisations, and the point which struck me from the resolutions from labour organisations was the feeling which they evidenced, throughout the country, that women should have both the municipal and the Parliamentary franchise. I have received representations from men of all parties in the State, and representing many different interests in the community. I myself have had a good deal to do with municipal affairs in my time, and I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Fife (Mr. Adamson), that good administration is at least as important as good legislation. For my part, I think one of the defects of Parliament is that it does not quite appreciate in all cases that good administration is often a great deal more important than good legislation, and that administration of an imperfect law often yields better results than bad administration of the most perfect law that Parliament could pass. There is no doubt that subjects pertaining to social legislation are matters in which women are vitally interested. Maternity, the welfare of children, and that great subject which has engaged



IMAGE 06



Tags= Wear, [Wikipedia](#), Women's March, Washington, USA, 2017

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the attention of the Government lately, the question of public health, and the question of housing, which is going to be one of the problems to be dealt with immediately after the War—all these subjects appeal to women, whose point of view in regard to them differs from that of men, and in regard to which they possess a very different kind of knowledge from that of men. They have intimate knowledge of them and I think it is extremely important that we should have not only the intelligence of women, but the heart of women, interested in these questions, and that they should be rendered capable of expressing those practically in the determining of these great matters.

What I find in all the representations made to me, not only from the women but from the men, is the great sense of the injustice of the illogical arrangement ⁷⁰⁸ by which the Parliamentary vote is to be given to women who are the wives of electors, and that the municipal vote should be refused to them. It strikes women as illogical and absurd. I think there is a good deal of force in what my right hon. Friend said in moving the Amendment, that it is extremely desirable, when you are for the time being settling the women's franchise, that you should settle it on a logical basis, and not on a basis of compromise which would leave a sense of injustice which is rather acutely felt, and which you could remove by the adoption of such a proposal as that contained in the Amendment. Women will feel that it is unfair and unreasonable that they should be deprived of the municipal franchise, for which they are at least as well qualified as for the Parliamentary franchise, and in which they have a more intimate interest, an interest which they feel very seriously. I do not think that there is any argument in saying that it is brought forward at a late period of the Bill. That is only an off-putting argument which has no validity. This is the last opportunity of dealing with it in this House, and I hope my right hon. Friend will not use that

argument now, and I am sure he will not. We were all extremely gratified at the favourable manner in which the Home Secretary received the deputation which waited upon him to urge this matter. I think he is aware that there is a great deal of feeling in the country in favour of this Amendment. I know that that feeling is very strong in Scotland and in England also. I hope that he will be able on this occasion to give us a favourable answer. We are not asking anything which is contrary to a direct resolution of the Conference. We are asking a thing which I do not think it can even be pretended by my right hon. Friend (Sir F. Banbury) can possibly do any harm, and for a thing which is keenly desired by a great number of women and men also in this country.

SIR HERBERT ROBERTS

I do not think it is necessary really to add any further arguments on one side or the other with regard to this Amendment, and I simply rose to express my earnest hope that the Home Secretary will be in favour of accepting the Amendment. I am one of those who have, of course, received a great number of representations, particularly from all parts of Wales, upon this point. I can assure the Home ⁷⁰⁹Secretary that the feeling in Wales is very strong in favour of the Amendment. If I may say so, I think we ought to go behind those representations to our own knowledge of the facts of the case, and the judgment which I formed on this question, being long ago in favour of woman suffrage and in favour of giving the suffrage to married women in Parliamentary affairs, is that I can see no reason why it should not be given to married women in municipal affairs as well. I agree with every speaker who has emphasised the fact that in reality this municipal vote from the woman's standpoint is quite as important, if not more so, than the Parliamentary franchise. As the Home Secretary will, I am sure, like to know what is the general feeling not only of those



Tags= Draw, Flickr, LSE, Women's Library, UK, c.1909

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who happen to be in the House but in the country generally on the Amendment, I can assure him, speaking for Wales, of which I have a close knowledge, that Wales, at all events, will heartily welcome the acceptance of this Amendment.

MR. SHERWELL

I find myself in a somewhat different position from some of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have spoken on this particular Amendment. I confess, speaking as one who has a most ardent and earnest desire to enlist the co-operation of all the women in the conduct of public affairs in this country, the matter does not present itself, to my mind, as quite so simple a matter as it appeared to present itself to some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. After all, this particular Bill, in connection with which this Amendment is moved, is primarily and pre-eminently a Bill to extend the Parliamentary franchise. It seems to me in order to make out at this stage of the proceedings on this Bill a strong and unanswerable case for an innovation of this kind it is necessary to prove that there is a parity or a close resemblance in principle between the grounds upon which the Parliamentary franchise has hitherto been granted and the grounds upon which the local government franchise has been granted. Whether we may agree on the facts or not, it is the case that historically and in practice the local government franchise has been granted on quite other grounds than those on which the Parliamentary franchise has been advocated and granted in times past. My right hon. Friend (Mr. McKinnon Wood), in his speech just now, indicated what of ⁷¹⁰ course was a very important fact, namely, that the advocates of this particular Amendment recognise the anomaly under which, if this Amendment were passed, certain ages of women would be qualified to exercise the vote in local government elections who were not qualified to exercise the vote in Parliamentary elections. He intimated that the promoters of this Amendment



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would be quite willing to accept a modification and to restrict the age of this franchise to thirty. I cannot help thinking that it is somewhat inconvenient in connection with an important innovation of this kind that this matter was not fully considered before the Amendment itself was proposed. I am bound to say I should feel myself extremely reluctant to grant the local government franchise to a number of women when similar women of a similar age qualification were not entitled to exercise the Parliamentary vote.

I most fully and entirely sympathise with those who urge that in many of the problems of local government women have a very especial interest and concern; but, after all, may I point out that when it comes to the question of local legislation and local arrangements concerning such matters as housing, sanitation and the rest, the real work is to be done by those who represent the various classes in the community. It does so happen at the present time that, irrespective of this Amendment, it is open to women to be elected on local governing bodies. It is immensely more important that women should be qualified to act as members of local governing bodies than that women should be qualified to vote for the election of those particular bodies. I am bound to say, so far as I am concerned, the substance of that objection is entirely met by the fact that under present arrangements women are qualified to be elected as members of our local governing bodies. I am not altogether convinced by the argument of my right hon. Friend who has just spoken that there is no validity in the argument that a Motion of this kind should not be raised on the Report stage. I respectfully venture to express my own feeling that it is a practice to be deprecated that a very great innovation of this kind should be raised on this stage.

MR. WOOD

It was merely put off at the request of the Home Secretary



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because the House happened to be a thin House at the moment when it was under discussion in Committee.⁷¹¹

MR. SHERWELL

I quite agree, but I am bound to regard with some disquietude the tendency to repeat discussions on important questions, very often involving revolutions in the procedure and method of government, on the Report stage. On the whole, while I should most cordially support any Amendment, if such an Amendment were proposed, to put women local government electors on precisely the same footing as Parliamentary electors, I feel great reluctance to support an Amendment which would, as the Home Secretary very justly pointed out to an important deputation, qualify as local government electors a large body of women on grounds which are not recognised in the exercise of the Parliamentary franchise

10.00 P.M.

MR. PETO

The right hon. Gentleman the Member for the St. Rollox Division (Mr. Mckinnon Wood) said it would be universally held to be illogical to refuse the municipal franchise to women while granting the Parliamentary franchise to them. I venture to say that that is an entire misconception of the position. The proposals at the Conference did not propose to refuse the local government franchise to women. Women who are ratepayers are left as they are at present as voters in the matter of the collection and expenditure of the rates. That is a totally different question from the Parliamentary franchise with regard to national affairs. The right hon. Gentleman went on to say that women outside regard this refusal—although it is no refusal at all—as unreasonable and unfair.

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Tags= Wear, [Flickr](#), LSE, Mary Lowndes Album,
UK, c.1910

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The main argument of the hon. Member for West Fife (Mr. Adamson) was that if we had granted so large an amount of enfranchisement to women in respect of the Parliamentary vote, it was hardly common sense to deny them this small extension in the matter of the local government vote, and he could not see any ground on which the extension could be refused. It would be as well perhaps to point out what is the real difference between the two franchises. In speaking to the deputation yesterday, the Home Secretary said he had strong evidence that it was difficult to reconcile the proposal for giving the Parliamentary vote to married women while denying the municipal vote to the same class. As I understood the Debates upstairs in Mr. Speaker's Conference on this question, the two things were kept entirely separate for two reasons. The first was that we ⁷¹² were not immediately concerned with the local government vote, but with the Parliamentary franchise. In dealing with any change in the local government franchise we were influenced by the fact that in local government affairs the main consideration about which electors voted was the collection and expenditure of the rates, and therefore there was a broad distinction between the basis of the franchise—the right to vote in the two cases. I ask the House to consider what would be the effect of this Amendment if passed. It would enfranchise the wife of every local government elector, and that means that if women take a different view from men on certain matters, there would be a woman candidate run on a programme which might involve a vast expenditure of the rates, and the election might be carried mainly by women electors, the wives of ratepayers, who, in the vast majority of cases, might object to these large and expensive schemes. That is what would really happen, and I think a more unjust and unfair proposal could hardly be made than that you should give a preponderating vote to the people who do not pay the rates, so that they may run their own candidate in support of a programme involving expenditure to an excessive amount.

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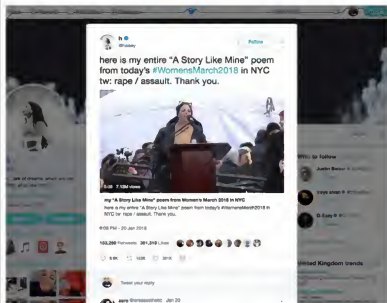
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I want to refer to just one other matter in this connection, and that is that the right hon. Gentleman the Member for St. Rollox (Mr. Mckinnon Wood) suggested that there was no specific recommendation from Mr. Speaker's Conference on this subject. But I find that in 31 (b) it is provided that the husband and wife shall not both be qualified in respect of the same premises. A question debated before dinner was whether there should be any value qualification for the ownership of land, and on that point the recommendations of the Conference obviously left it open, but here we have a specific recommendation dealing with a specific point, that the husband and wife shall not be qualified in respect of the same premises. If hon. Members vote for this Amendment I hope they will not do it under any delusion that they are not voting in direct opposition to a specific recommendation on a subject thoroughly debated and considered by the Conference.

CAPTAIN J. B. WATSON

I desire to support the Amendment in a few words. My first reason is that, like other hon. and right hon. Members, I have received ⁷¹³very strong direct recommendations from my Constituency asking me to take that course. Another reason is that for ten years I have been a member of a municipal corporation, and in casting my mind back over those ten years the thing which impresses me more than anything else is that this House and the Legislature has increasingly sent to local bodies many valuable and serious matters to be dealt with, and of all the matters so sent perhaps the most important, particularly at this juncture of our national history, is the question of infant preservation and child welfare. In that subject I have personally taken great interest. I have sat as Chairman of a Child Welfare Committee, and on that committee, which consists of about fifteen members, four or five are married women. Looking back over those ten years,

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Tags= Poetry, Twitter, Women's March, New York City, USA, 2018

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I say that there has been no subject before us upon which the married women would not have been competent to vote, and upon which their vote would not have been very valuable. If it were only for this one subject of infant preservation I think that that in itself is sufficient to justify us in asking this House to grant a municipal vote to married women. For these reasons, stated quite briefly, I sincerely trust that this House will accept the Amendment.

MR. G. THORNE

I desire to support this Amendment on its merits. I am entirely in favour of the suggestion, because it seems to me that in matters which municipal authorities have to deal with, married women are most affected, and it is pre-eminently desirable that their voices should be heard upon them. I should like to point out one thing which has hardly been emphasised sufficiently, and that is that the proposal bears no party or political significance. The hon. Gentleman who represents the Labour party spoke very strongly and forcibly to-night on behalf of his whole party, and if reference be made to the Agenda Paper it will be seen that the six names attached to the Amendment are equally divided between the other parties in the House of Commons. The appeal is made consequently from the standpoint of all who are interested in this question. I too have been approached very urgently to support this Amendment on its merits. I look for the co-operation of women in the future far more than we have had it in the past both nationally and locally, and I sincerely trust it may be possible to secure ⁷¹⁴ that co-operation by means of this Amendment. I honestly say that I have only one difficulty myself in coming to a final decision. I want to see this Bill carried into law, and I am not prepared to do anything whatever in the slightest degree to endanger it. Much, therefore, as I support the Amendment, my anxiety is to know whether there is any danger in that

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Tags= Speech, Katherine Douglas Smith, LSE,
Women's Library, Portsmouth, UK, c.1906

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direction, and consequently I appeal directly to the Home Secretary, who has charge of the matter, in due course to express his opinion. I should like to be permitted to say on Report what I ventured to say in Committee, that no man could possibly have striven more justly and more courteously to carry out the wishes of the Speaker's Conference. We all recognise that from beginning to end he has brought his mind to bear to understand, both in the letter and in the spirit, what the Conference proposed. He has striven his best to carry that out, and I believe he will try to do so now. He knows the feeling in the country, because it has already been presented to him. He knows the feeling in this House from all sections. There is a very earnest desire, which I sincerely trust may be responded to, that these married women may be allowed to have the municipal vote. I earnestly trust, therefore, that the Home Secretary, facing this matter with the responsibility on his shoulders, to carry out the wishes of the Speaker's Conference and not to depart from them, will find it possible to accept this Amendment.

SIR G. CAVE

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton (Mr. G. Thorne), who made a generous reference to my services on this Bill, has made an appeal to me to say what view the Government take on this particular question. This is an Amendment of very great importance. The proposal is that the wife of a local government elector shall have a vote, not by virtue of her own ownership or occupation, but by virtue of her being the wife of her husband who is himself an elector. The effect of the Amendment will be to add a very large number—I suppose not less than five millions—to the register of local government electors. I say five millions, for whereas there are already, I suppose, a million women who are electors for local government purposes—and of course they have to be



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Tags= Lecture, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie,
YouTube, TEDxEuston, London, UK, 2012

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deducted from the addition to the vote—on the other hand, this Amendment gives the vote not only to women of thirty, but to women of twenty-⁷¹⁵ one who are wives of electors. It is, therefore, a very important Amendment indeed. I am certainly not going to bring forward the consideration which I advanced in Committee, that we are debating the matter in a thin House. This is not a thin House, and, even if it were, I think, as everybody then yielded to my argument that we should postpone this matter for definite decision on the Report stage, it is desirable for the House to consider and decide the matter to-day. Let us look at it carefully. I have never concealed my opinion that there is a, strong argument in favour of the Amendment, and that the argument that the wife shall vote for the election of a Member of Parliament, but that she shall not vote in a local government election, is a very difficult one to sustain. Even those who have for years opposed the giving of the franchise to women have, many of them, been in favour of giving women the municipal franchise. Many of us are, no doubt, impressed with the argument that it is desirable to make a clean job of it, and not to leave something behind for future consideration.

I confess that these arguments weigh with me personally very strongly indeed; but, on the other hand, there is a view which Members have put forward, and which they have been entitled to put forward. They say, and say with truth, that this is primarily a Parliamentary reform Bill, and that it is not primarily a local government election reform Bill. On that view the question arises as to whether we should deal with this question in this Bill or whether it had better be dealt with on a future occasion. I am put, as I often have been, in this position on this Amendment. I must remember, and if I may say so the House must remember, that this is a compromise measure. We cannot have on this Bill all that we want. Time after time—I am sure I am within the recollection of the House—I



Tags= Lecture, Millicent Fawcett, Flickr, LSE,
Women's Library, Edinburgh, UK, 1925

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have appealed to my Friends—if I may so distinguish them as the party with which I have always acted, for I think we have all acted together on this Bill—by saying, “You may be right, but, after all, this is a compromise, and you must give in; you must abide by the compromise, and waive your own personal opinions.” On this point—there can be no mistake about it—the terms of the compromise are quite clear. I do not ⁷¹⁶ understand why my hon. Friend opposite expressed any doubt on the point. The Conference Report say this: For the purpose of this Resolution neither sex nor marriage shall be a disqualification— that is dealing with the local government register— provided that a husband and wife shall not both be qualified in respect of the same premises. The words are introduced from the existing Statute; they were put into the Report; they are put into the Bill; and I cannot understand the argument that the Conference has not reported on this point, or that we should not in adopting this measure be running counter to the advice given to us by the Conference. I do not want to make a fetish of the Conference, but, after all, a compromise is a compromise, and when we get certain things we want and have to give up certain things we should also like, we must abide by the terms of the arrangement. I appeal to the House to remember that consideration. I know the views which hon. Gentlemen hold; I know with many of them how strong they are. Whether I share them or not is not for me to say on this occasion. My function time after time has been to call upon the House not in one direction or the other to press their personal views so as to break through the agreement, an agreement which I think will be of great benefit to the nation as a whole.

Let me add some minor considerations. You have not, as to men, assimilated the Parliamentary and municipal franchises. Under this Bill—there is no Amendment in this respect, nor is one even suggested—they will widely differ, and, therefore,

Lecturing
 Staff Manchester Branch,
 1 Miss Helene Downy London,
 2 Mrs Edwick L. Mier-Battley,
 3 Mrs Eke Corrick Manchester,
 4 Mrs David R. Vera-Battley,
 5 Mrs Oliver Bluffatchard Tholey,
 6 Mrs Warburton Leeds,
 the above all through Scotland and England
 in the years 1891 and 1892, holding meetings and
 demonstrations in all large towns and villages
 Saint George Hall, Bradford Yorkshire December
 22nd 1892, the Larn Wife of the Member
 Mr. John Cuthbert in the Chair, who was
 married to a bright-eloquent sister of John Bright
 and Joseph Sturge the opponent of Speaker, who
 heard on the women's question in the chair
 Justice, Temperance, Room, York, in some weeks in
 the Chain Down Hall, Newcastle at a time
 April 2nd 1894 Chair man Mrs. Horrocks
 the change of Newcastle, this year demonstration
 at the hall to come here, this is the only demonstration
 at the hall this is copied from in the year 1892 When the
 Staff held a Great Demonstration there,
 Vice Countess Harborton in the Chair,
 my Dear Wife, gave me the original copy
 and I give it very much to take gift
 for old times sake and as not get some more from
 help them to get the vote but two and a

Tags= Lecture, Flickr, LSE, Women's Library,
 Manchester, UK, c.1908



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there is nothing so anomalous in the fact that as to women also you should leave a difference, although, I admit, a greater difference. Secondly, this Amendment, whatever the intention of the mover, does give the local franchise to women of twenty-one and not to women of thirty. There is no word in the Amendment that would have a different effect, and you are proposing to put on the local register a very substantially larger number of women than this Bill will add to the Parliamentary register. The House has always been good enough to listen to my views, although they are not bound to follow them; and I think that, having regard to the position in which we are, hon. Members ought to put their personal views and opinions ⁷¹⁷ aside, while reserving their right to propose this important change in some future Bill. I think I am bound to say that the Government cannot accept this Amendment or depart from the position which they have strenuously maintained, that the compromise must be observed.

MR. H. SAMUEL

The speech of the right hon. Gentleman places me in a position of very great difficulty. On the merits of the proposal I am entirely at one with the Amendment. None of the arguments against it appear to me to be valid, and the one point that the right hon. Gentleman has just made—that this would extend the municipal vote to women below the age of thirty, whilst the Parliamentary vote is only granted to women above that age—could and would be met by my right hon. Friend adding to his Amendment words to this effect, “and has attained the age of thirty years.” The argument of my right hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield, that it is more important for women to serve on local bodies than to be electors to local bodies, is, I think, sound; but how can they get elected upon if they are not electors too? We find there are a most inadequate number of women upon local authorities, and the main reason



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is that the electorate consist almost entirely of men. The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes, that we shall have women voting for large increases of expenditure, is, I think, a very unlikely innovation. Undoubtedly, being by far the more economical sex of the two, their influence would be used in local elections in cutting down expenditure to what is legitimate and reasonable.

An appeal has been made to the Speaker's Conference by the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Home Secretary. He says that the Conference has made a specific recommendation, in terms the interpretation of which cannot be doubtful, that the man and woman shall not be electors for a local government body for the same premises. It is true that the question of the local franchise was not referred to the Speaker's Conference, as he himself pointed out to the deputation that waited upon him. Still, the fact remains that the Speaker's Conference did make a number of recommendations relating to the local franchise in connection with women's suffrage and in other respects and that these arrangements were part of the compromise come to within the Conference. It is quite true what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has said ⁷¹⁸ that on many occasions—to-day was one of them—he has been obliged to ask the House to reject proposals moved by political friends of his, and with which he himself personally sympathised, because they were in conflict with the recommendations of the Conference. There have been many such occasions when he appeals to us to act in the same manner and to put aside our own personal desires in keeping the letter of the recommendations of the Conference, I confess, as I say, it is exceedingly difficult for me to ask my friends not to respond to that appeal—very difficult! However, I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will pursue this worthy cause to the end, and that when he comes to the question of proxy votes, which were not recommended by the Speaker's Conference,

MRS. FAWCETT'S MANIFESTO.

TO ALL THE SOCIETIES IN THE
NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S
SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES.

*Reprinted from the "Common Cause," December 14, 1906, by kind
permission of the Editor.*

THE Special Council meeting on Saturday last to consider our policy for the General Election resulted in a vigorously worded resolution to support Women's Suffrage candidates where such are being run, and (to use, for the sake of brevity only, the more general term) to support the friends and oppose the enemies of the Constitution Bill, irrespective of party in the electoral contest upon which the country is now voting.

At such short notice as we were compelled to give, it could not be expected that all the Societies in the Union should be represented at the Council on Saturday. There are a few special guests brought forward from which I am particularly anxious to press upon all my friends and colleagues in the National Union.

The first is that the men let anyone persuade you that Mr. Asquith's declaration of his future position towards a Woman's suffrage Bill is of no value. It is not all that we want, but it is of very great significance and practical political importance. His exact words were:—"The Government will, if they are able to pass, give the Bill in the next Parliament. He absolutely precludes, with a B.B., if we failed to do so, of any amendment."

Of course, what we Suffragists desired was a pledge for 1907-1908 instead of "next Parliament." We also desired a specific pledge for 1907-1908, not a bill, like the Bill of the Canadian Constitution drafted on our party lines, because we believe that such a Bill is the only one which has a chance of getting through all its stages in the House of Commons.

But, though Mr. Asquith's statement was contradictory to us giving a promise for next Session, and was 1907-1908 as to the kind of Suffrage Bill for which he said we would be given, yet the promise of the Prime Minister that he intended to give us a Woman's Suffrage Bill is of the very greatest practical political importance, and advances (in whole terms) of the Woman's Suffrage question as a definite issue before the country at the coming General Election.

What did we still mean? The Times say on November 14th on this very point! After quoting the text of Mr. Asquith's statement it adds:

"In other words, Women Suffrage is an issue at this election, and if the election confirms the Government in power the next Parliament will be enabled to have removed a scandal on the subject of Women Suffrage."

Tags=Write, Millicent Fawcett, Flickr,
LSE, Women's Library, UK, c.1910

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he will still adopt the same attitude, and when it is a question of dealing with the creations of large numbers of additional plural voters, which is not in accordance with the scheme of the Conference, that he will still adopt the same view. If I can understand from him that he will throughout the remainder of the Bill strictly adhere to the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference, and not go outside them, unless there is a general body of consent in the House, then, I am sure, we shall, many of us, at all events consider it our duty to respond now to his appeal. I will press these points upon him. Are we to understand that we are to proceed strictly on the lines of the Speaker's Conference, and if some of us put aside our own predilections now, can we rely on the right hon. Gentleman and his friends to put aside their predilections when we come to other points on which opinion is divided, and when there is no general assent for departing from the recommendations of the Conference? I put that point specifically to the right hon. Gentleman.

MR. BUTCHER

I hope it is not too late even now to make an appeal to the Home Secretary to reconsider his decision. He has said, and it may be he is right in saying, that this Amendment as it stands on the Paper cannot be accepted, but surely he could accept the Amendment standing in the name of the hon. Member for the Tradeston Division (Mr. Dundas White), and which gives the municipal vote to the woman, who is entitled to be registered as a Parliamentary elector. That would meet the views of the hon. ⁷¹⁹ Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sherwell) and others. The speech just delivered by the right hon. Gentleman is, to my mind, the gravest menace to our Parliamentary liberties, because he says, "I will support you in this matter, in which I do not believe, and I will assist you in getting the House to vote against their convictions on this



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Tags= Speech, Michelle Obama, Youtube, New Hampshire, USA, 2016

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occasion, provided you force the House on other occasions against their wishes." Surely that is a very disastrous precedent to introduce into our Parliamentary practice. I really think that the right hon. Gentleman, on reconsideration, will see that it was not a very wise mode of urging his point upon the Home Secretary, and I hope the Home Secretary will see the danger of falling into that trap, because later on, when he is going, as I understand, to leave the question of voting by proxy open to the House, he will be met by the right hon. Gentleman, who will say, "You would not leave this question of the women's vote to the House; therefore, you would not be acting rightly in leaving the question of the proxy vote to the House." I do appeal to the right hon. Gentleman, now that his eyes have been opened to the trap into which it is sought to lead him, to reconsider his decision.

May I just put very shortly two points which appeal to me? The first point is that this House has, practically unanimously, decided that married women are to have the Parliamentary vote. I confess that to the plain, common-sense man, either inside or outside this House, it is impossible to justify the attitude of the man who says a married woman is entitled to have the Parliamentary vote, and to vote on all great questions affecting this country, and yet she is not to vote in municipal affairs. I try to put myself in the position of the plainest and most ordinary man possible—it is quite easy—to see if there is any justification for that attitude, and I cannot find any. That is not all. You have this strange position. The married woman who is living with her husband—as all proper married women are, and as all well-meaning husbands desire, and as always happens except in exceptional cases—would be deprived of this vote; but let her go and live away from her husband, from whatever cause, and obtain the residential vote, then she is entitled to vote in municipal affairs, while her worthy sister is deprived of this vote. That ⁷²⁰ is an anomaly which it is very



Tags= Speech, Emmeline Pankhurst, Flickr, LSE,
Women's Library, London, UK, c.1908

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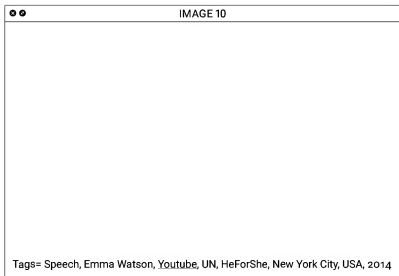
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IMAGE 11

hard to justify. Let me put one other proposition. Is there any class of the community who are and ought to be more interested in the kind of matters that come up for discussion on local authorities than the married women? Sanitation, education, the care of children, housing—one of the most urgent and pressing questions of the day which cannot be postponed—all of them come before the local authority and they are matters upon which the married women most of all are entitled to vote. How can you go to the married woman and say, "You can have a vote on matters affecting the Army and Navy and matters affecting the welfare of the country, but you cannot vote on matters which affect the welfare and happiness of yourselves and your children?" That is an impossible position, and I ask my right hon. Friend to reconsider the position. In his speech the right hon. Gentleman did not use one word of argument, and could not against the merits of this proposal. I have not heard a single argument against it, but in his desire to do justice to all parties he asks us to adhere to the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference. Surely that Conference is not going to enforce upon us a proposal in regard to which our intelligence revolts and almost every hon. Member who has addressed the House has spoken in favour of this Amendment. To refuse this proposal would be an abuse of the term "compromise." A compromise settles broad questions of principle, and with Mr. Speaker's assistance we have done this in a manner which will see the Bill through; but if the compromise is distorted in order to force an unwilling House to do something contrary to its convictions and to all argument, then we shall be turning that compromise into a farce. Surely in a matter which so vitally and deeply affects the prosperity and welfare of working men my right hon. Friend might give some further consideration to the matter, and act in a way which will commend itself to the general feeling of the House.



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COLONEL GREIG

No doubt the attitude which the Home Secretary has taken up has been founded upon the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference, in which it is said that a husband and wife shall not both be qualified in respect of the same premises. May I call attention to the fact that, as regards Scotland and Ireland, the Speaker's Conference leaves this matter absolutely at large. Is it true ⁷²¹ to say that if you give the married woman the franchise for local government she will be qualified in respect of the same premises as her husband. As a matter of fact, she is qualified not in respect of her occupation of those premises, but because she is a married woman. That is the status she occupies, and therefore it is not in contradiction to the suggestion of the Speaker's Conference, which was only directed to the fact that for local government as a local government qualification she should be qualified and put upon the register as being in occupation of those premises. She is put on as the wife of her husband, who is a local government elector. Her status is in respect of her being a married woman. I think the right hon. Gentleman might very well permit the House to vote at large on this Amendment.

SIR E. POLLOCK

The hon. and learned Member for York (Mr. Butcher) has begged the House to remove an anomaly which, he says, will exist if this Amendment is not carried. It would be very easy indeed to find a number of anomalies which will still remain in spite of the good work which is being done by this Bill. One anomaly comes into my mind at once. I understand the claim is made for a married woman to have a vote for local government purposes by reason of her status. Supposing a married woman is the owner or tenant of the premises in respect of which the vote arises, she will be entitled under



IMAGE 11

Tags= Speech, Hillary Clinton, Youtube, Beijing, China, 1995

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Clause 4, Sub-section (3), to the vote because she would have been entitled to be registered if she had been a man. Is it proposed that the husband is also to get a vote in respect of those premises by reason of his status? If not, you are creating a very curious anomaly. If a married woman is to have a vote by reason of her status, surely, in the interests of the domestic bliss which the hon. and learned Gentleman has just pictured to us so pleasantly, the man ought not to be left out. Surely we ought to remove the anomaly and give the vote also to the man by reason of his status. I want to point that out, because this Bill no doubt leaves a great number of anomalies. I do not believe that we are going to remove all the anomalies by passing this Amendment, and we are really going far beyond what was contemplated by the Conference. It would be very unfortunate if under these circumstances we adopted a different franchise, which really cannot be justified on the basis of equality between the sexes.⁷²²

SIR G. TOULMIN

The hon. and learned Member for York (Mr. Butcher) scarcely did justice to the position of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for the Cleveland Division (Mr. H. Samuel). If on account of the compromise a certain section of Members are to be muzzled in matters on which they have a strong opinion, then in other matters on which they have a strong adverse opinion, other sections should also be muzzled. The Home Secretary has not made any response to that suggestion. Some of us feel very strongly upon this point; and we would rather like to know whether he is quite definite in stating that the matter is not to be left open to the House. If he puts the muzzle on, I suppose we shall have to take it definitely that the muzzle will be left on in regard to all these matters which are settled by the compromise. The recognition of the wife's vote through the husband's qualification in regard

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to the Parliamentary franchise is of supreme importance to the nation, and I hold that it is quite as important, if not more so, locally. With regard to the argument that this is primarily a Parliamentary franchise Bill, of course the question was raised entirely because of the position of the Parliamentary franchise, but we are dealing to a certain extent with the local franchise, and the probability is that we are dealing with it for some years to come. Owing to what has happened, the position with regard to woman suffrage has ripened very much, and it becomes more and more anomalous that women should be capable of electing a Member of Parliament and incapable of voting at local government elections, while other women can sit upon local bodies I shall be very sorry if we are bound to let pass this opportunity of securing an act of justice to the family which might very well be taken by the House in view of the questions which will have to come before the local councils in the near future.

COLONEL SANDERS

I hope that the implication which was made by the hon. Member who has just sat down will not go unchallenged, the implication being that when the Conference was appealed to it was always at the expense of his party. That is very far from being the truth. On one occasion after another the Home Secretary has given up points, in regard to which I do not say I know, but I am very strongly of opinion that he was in agreement, in order simply to stick to the terms ⁷²³ of the compromise. I take, perhaps, the strongest case of all, that of the conscientious objector. Does anyone suppose that, if it had not been for the attitude of the Home Secretary on that occasion, the claims of the conscientious objector to the vote would not have been thrown out in Committee? I wish to protest in the strongest possible way against the implication made by the hon. Gentleman, and also made by

IMAGE 01



Tags = Arrest, Rosa May Billinghurst, Flickr, LSE, Women's Library, UK , 1908

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the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Cleveland (Mr. H. Samuel), that appeals to make the compromise effective have gone against the party to which they belong. Absolutely the reverse is the case.

SIR G. TOULMIN

May I be allowed to repudiate having made any implication of the kind?

COLONEL SANDERS

I accept the hon. Member's repudiation. On the merits of the question, I want to put it on a little broader ground than the decision of the Conference. In Committee there was what I might call a strenuous Debate on the whole question of woman suffrage. On that occasion the opponents of woman suffrage urged over and over again, "You say now that you are only going to this extent; that you are only going so far and no further. We do not believe you. We believe that, if this is once granted, you will only make it a jumping-off place to get still further concessions for the cause of woman suffrage." Surely it is up to those who on that occasion voted in favour of woman suffrage—I am one; I always voted for it, long before it became the popular cause it is now—to show that they are ready to abide by the exact terms of woman suffrage as it was then decided upon. Nothing has been more remarkable than the fact that when this very great change in our franchise law—the admission of woman to the suffrage—has come up on the Report stage, not a word has been said against the general principle. Its opponents in this House, and they are many, have not lifted their voices against woman suffrage at all. That being so, after having accepted the principle, it is almost a breach of faith that we should go back upon the compromise then decided upon. As to the actual merits of this proposal, I would only say that the importance of the



Tags= Socialise, [Flickr](#), LSE, Women's Library, Merton, UK, c.1910

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whole thing is enormously exaggerated. As it stands, the husband can get on the register for the occupation of any premises,⁷²⁴ however small their value may be. If he wants to give his wife a vote he has only to see that some small portion of these premises, on which there is no limit of value, is put in her name. It gives him a little extra trouble, perhaps, but that is the whole extent of the grievance, if grievance it can be called. The Bill is so framed that if a man wants to get his wife on, all he has to do is to create a fagot vote. Surely that is not worth making a fuss about. It cannot really be called a substantial grievance at all. I think the Home Secretary was perfectly right in adhering to the arrangement arrived at in Committee.

MR. LEIF JONES

The last speaker rather suggested that as the opponents of woman suffrage do not raise their voices upon this occasion we should be gratifying them if we did not try to carry this Amendment. Many of the strongest opponents of woman suffrage are to be found among supporters of the franchise for local government. I need only point to the name of the hon. Member (Mr. Arnold Ward), which is on the Order Paper as one of the supporters of this Resolution, to show that some of the strongest opponents of women suffrage have always argued that they should have the fullest equality with men in matters of local government. One of the stock arguments upon the question which has always been understood by the opponents of women suffrage, is that women should serve their apprenticeship in voting in local government matters and thereby attain to the exercise of the greater privilege and the greater power of the Parliamentary vote. I think it will be admitted by all that if we give the franchise to married women of the age of thirty—I take it there is no doubt the two franchises will be assimilated in the matter of age—we



IMAGE 03



Tags= [Flickr](#), LSE, Mary Lowndes Album, London, UK, c.1912

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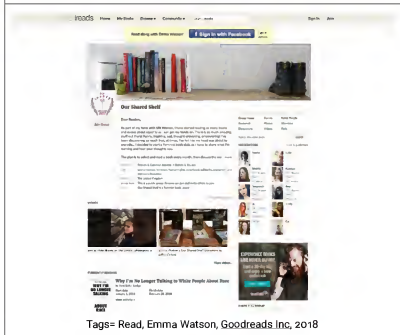
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place ourselves in a position of absurdity if we say women are to vote upon the Army and Navy and foreign affairs, and all the matters of Imperial interest which have to be decided by this Assembly, and decline to extend to them at the same time the power to vote in all matters concerning local affairs. I hope the House will not land itself in that absurd position.

CAPTAIN O'NEILL

It seems to me it would have been better if the point referred to by the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Samuel) had not been raised. I am entirely of the opinion that you cannot ⁷²⁵ argue against the merits of this question. It seems to me unanswerable that if you are going to give women the power to vote on Imperial questions—Army, Navy, foreign policy, and all matters which are decided by the Members of this House—logically you must give them the vote for the smaller local government affairs. But I was very much impressed by what the Home Secretary said, and I fully realise that this is a matter of immense importance which possibly it is not desirable to deal with at this already late stage of the Bill in a House which, although not thin, is not prepared thoroughly and adequately to consider. I hope those hon. Members who accept the lead on this matter of the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Samuel) do not wish it to go forth to the world that the only people who are in favour of giving votes to women in local government matters are the members of their party. That is not so at all. The hon. Member for York (Mr. Butcher) has spoken in the same strain, and I myself on the merits am clearly in favour of it. On the other hand, I hope that those hon. Members who look to the right hon. Gentleman as their leader in this matter do not wish it to go forth to the world that it is they and they alone who oppose voting for soldiers by proxy. I think it was most unfortunate that these bargains were bandied across the House in this way, "If you will give, up proxy voting we will



Tags= Read, Emma Watson, Goodreads Inc, 2018

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give up this." I think it is most undesirable that a matter of that sort should have been introduced into this discussion. I feel convinced that there are many Members of the party to which I belong who are in favour of the principle adumbrated by this Amendment, and I believe, in fact I am certain, that there are many members of the party to which the right hon. Gentleman belongs who are quite willing to see the soldiers get their vote by proxy.

MR. HEMMERDE

It is just because I do not in any way claim that the supporters on this question come from one side that I strongly urge the House at any cost to press this Amendment. I have been in this House for about ten years, and I have heard many Debates upon women's suffrage, but I hardly remember an occasion upon which all the opponents practically were not agreed that if you confine your attempt in the enfranchisement of women to municipal affairs they would make no opposition. We have our chance. What happens? We ⁷²⁶ are told by the hon. Member who spoke last that it is a most unsuitable moment to deal with this. Women have been told that for years. At every attempt at giving them the franchise it has always been a most unsuitable moment to deal with it. The Home Secretary said he would consider the matter between the Committee stage and the Report stage. He has considered it, and to-night you have a fairly full House, and you have the supporters of woman suffrage in the past and also its opponents, represented by one who has been a leader and has spoken again and again against woman suffrage, all agreed that we ought to extend the municipal franchise to women. You have the further fact that after the War we are going to embark upon the most tremendous task this country has ever undertaken in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of this country; and at that moment, when I should have thought



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that women more than any other time, quite regardless of the service they have rendered in this War, would have had a claim for the extension of the franchise, giving them every possible advantage that municipal power can give, we are solemnly told that the time is not ripe. Why? I understand that the reason given—I was not in the House—is that we are bound by the Speaker's Conference; we are bound by the fact that there was a compromise in the Speaker's Conference, and that we ought to stand by it. How far is that going to be pressed? The Clause to which I attach as much importance as any in this Bill is Clause 17, the first Sub-section which deals with the question of the alternative vote. I think the Speaker's Conference dealt with that, but when it came to be debated here it was left to the free vote of the House. I have not been able to understand why.

SIR G. CAVE

That was not one of the unanimous Resolutions.

MR. HEMMERDE

I was under the impression that it was one of the Resolutions which we were told would have the support of the Government. I would like to know exactly where we are, and how far we are bound. The Speaker's Conference seemed to deliberately refrain from dealing with the question of the municipal vote for women. They did so for this reason, I imagine. It had never been a burning question. The House was ⁷²⁷so overwhelmingly in favour of it that it never arose in a controversial spirit at all. How long are you going to leave it in that half-hearted manner? If you do not pass it now it will perhaps be another ten years before the women get put upon the register. We are a great deal too timid in the way in which we handle the question of women suffrage. In the rest of the British Empire there is no such limit of thirty years of age. In America, where they have



Tags= Join, [Flickr](#), LSE, Women's Library, Oldham, UK, 1910

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given the vote to women, they have not limited it. The whole way in which we handle this question is quite unworthy of this House and of the crisis in which we stand. At last we have a chance of doing justice to women in regard to this municipal vote. I hope that the House will take the matter into its own hands no matter what is decided by the Government, and will at least do justice to the women in a matter on which we have all said again and again there is no opposition, and that we will not continue this absurd timidity which prevents us putting our franchise upon a democratic basis.

MR. RUNCIMAN

I would ask the Home Secretary whether he cannot see his way to leave the House to decide this matter. My reason is merely that the House had to decide on the larger subject of women suffrage, the Government were good enough to leave every individual Member free to express his opinion in his own way, without putting on the Government Whips. Now, when we are dealing with what must be a matter of minor importance, I suggest to the Home Secretary that it is fully consonant with the precedent which he himself has set to allow the House to decide this matter without the intervention of the Government Whips. I need hardly say for my own part that I would be reluctant to vote against the Government if this is made an official question. But I feel quite sure that there is no intention of making this, which was not one of the terms of reference to the Conference—

HON. MEMBERS

Yes it was.

MR. RUNCIMAN

No, on the contrary, I have the exact words used by the

✕

IMAGE 07



Tags= Meet; [Flickr](#); LSE; Women's Library; Emmeline Pethwick-Lawrence; UK; 1908

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Home Secretary, who, I think, has always been very fair in interpreting these matters: The whole object of appointing the Conference was if possible to come to an arrangement on matters affecting elections to Parliament, and nothing was referred to them as to the local government franchise.⁷²⁸ In these circumstances there is a fair case for asking the Government not to put on the Whips.

MR. T. WILSON

I support the right hon. Gentleman's appeal to the Home Secretary. If he is not prepared to accede to the appeal I would suggest that he leave the matter over until the next day set apart for the discussion of this Bill, with the object of consulting in the meantime the Leader of the House and the Government on the point. If he is not prepared to do that I would propose to him that he should adopt the suggestion made by the right hon. Gentleman, and consider the advisability of accepting the Amendment, adding words at the end which raise the age to thirty years. If he would accept that Amendment to the Amendment I am quite certain it will satisfy a very large number of the working married women of the country. As far as the working married women whom I have come across are concerned they are more strongly, perhaps, in favour of the local government than the Parliamentary vote, and I cannot understand why you give the bigger concession and keep back the minor one. It is so ridiculous that I hope the Government will accept the suggestion which has been made or otherwise postpone the discussion until the next day set apart for the discussion of the Bill.

COLONEL SIR C. SEELY

As a strong opponent of women's suffrage, I appeal to the Home Secretary, at all events, to leave this question to the House. There is really no reason why we should give the



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 Tags= Meet, Google Campus, London, UK, 2018

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Parliamentary vote and not the local government vote. The opinion of the Speaker's Conference has been quoted, and the recommendations of that body have been generally accepted in the country. I speak for my own Constituency, and I think I speak for the constituencies of many other Members when I state that we have, had no complaints and no letters relating to any subject connected with this Bill, except on this, in regard to which there has been a constant stream of communications asking us to give the women the local government vote on the same terms as the Parliamentary vote. I really think there is a misunderstanding of the whole opinion of the country on this point. As to the Conference, I do not suppose they paid much consideration to this subject, but, at all events, that ought not to stand in the way ⁷²⁹ of the real opinion of the House, and what is, I am quite certain, the great volume of opinion in the country.

COLONEL SIR ROBERT WILLIAMS

I would point out that there is a very great distinction between the Parliamentary vote and the municipal vote. The former has for long been divorced from any real stake in the country, while the municipal vote is given to those who pay rent. The married man who pays rent, by this Amendment, would have two votes, because he would have the vote of his wife, who does not pay rent. There is a distinction between the Parliamentary and municipal vote.

MR. MACCALLUM SCOTT

I appeal to the right hon. Gentleman to carry this matter over until Tuesday. It is too much to expect a decision at once. Will the right hon. Gentleman consent to carry the question over until Tuesday, and think it over in the meantime?

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IMAGE 09



Tags= Meet, Chartlotte Despard, WFL, Flickr, LSE, Women's Library, London, UK, 1911

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MR. BARLOW

I join in the appeal which has been made to the right hon. Gentleman, as I think it is very desirable that we should have a distinction as between the Parliamentary and the local government vote. I hope the point will be taken into further consideration.

MR. C. REES

There is a general idea or hope that the Home Secretary will take this into his very earnest consideration. The suggestion has been brought forward rather quickly, and at a late hour, and there has not been time to give it consideration. I would, therefore, suggest that the matter be adjourned until Tuesday next, so that there may be an opportunity for the right hon. Gentleman to consider it. There is a strong and a reasonable probability that when we again take up the subject we shall be able to show that not only women should have the Parliamentary vote at thirty years of age, but that they should also have the local government vote on the same terms. There is a strong feeling in the House and in the country that the municipal franchise should be granted on the same basis as the Parliamentary franchise.

It being Eleven of the clock, the Debate stood adjourned.⁷³⁰

Debate to be resumed upon Monday next.

The remaining Orders were read, and postponed.



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